

John 15

“You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

Sounds like works righteousness, doesn't it? It sounds like the bratty kid on the playground, “If you play by my rules you can be my friend.” Sounds like we need to do enough to achieve the label of friend. And maybe Jesus has his tallying slate out and if the scales start tipping a little too far, maybe he won't be your friend anymore.

Is that how you treat your friends?

Now we may have those people in our lives where we think, “if they do that one more time, I'm done.” And we could chat about how healthy that is or not, and boundaries. But I think we could all agree that if you think that way about someone, well, they probably aren't your best friend.

Our best friends we don't treat like that. It doesn't even come up in our heads like that. So what makes us think it does for Jesus? Is Jesus petty and capricious. Is he a snob that will say, “I suppose, let you be his friend if you clean yourself up a bit”? Is he the brat on the playground who wants things his way just because he's selfish and doesn't care about you?

We know that isn't our Jesus, the real Jesus. The friend of sinners who dwells with the lowly and rejoices in the meek and those hungering for righteousness. The one who works for our good.

So then what does this line mean? “You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

I suggest it means that if someone wants nothing to do with you, doesn't answer your messages, wouldn't help you on the side of the road, and talks behind your back – or not at all about you, well, they probably aren't your friend.

And you don't need a tally slate to know that, do you?

And so Jesus speaks of servants and Masters, and the servant does the command because they *have* to. They don't have a choice. Even more, they don't know, are not incentivized by, and don't particularly care about the vision or plan of the master. It's a fast-food worker, they don't care what the profit margin on the franchise is as Wendys. They just want their hourly wage and to go home.

Jesus says, "that's not you." And Yes, He's the King, we are the servants, but is the Church a fast food franchise? Or, as he says today, has he let us in on the plan – the redemption of the World in his death and resurrection that we are united with and participate in? Are we united with the Master in his love and longing to bring about truth and save the lost? We are. And have we seen that the Master, the King, is good and working for our good even in the hard times? Yes! This text comes immediately after his image of the vine and branches, if you are in him you will bear fruit, it's impossible to do so otherwise. You are in him, and so his commands are the fruit, it's not a tally competition, it's a reality of the fruits of faith. Faith given by grace.

And so he calls us friends. And the cheesy preacher move is to try and rob of us this grace by saying, "Or are you an acquaintance only?" And for those walking down paths of destruction and open unrepentance I think that is a fair question. "You say Jesus is the King, the Creator, and he died for you because he loves you so much, and he is the omnipotent God of the cosmos and electrons?" And they say "yeah," and then I ask, "But you don't care what he has to say about... sexuality, or money, or whatever..." And they say, "Nah." Really? You don't care what your friend has to say about that? And what does that say about your relationship with that friend, or faith in them? Nothing good. And so Jesus says, "If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love." Again, is that a tally mark, or a reality that openly walking away from the will of your friend will... change that relationship, change you...

So we who love Jesus, who stood and confessed him as God, may we hearken to his word, it's for our good, how could it not be!? And when we are tempted to get the tally slate out again, the scoreboard, and we wonder in despair, "Am I just an acquaintance?!" Or we puff up in pride, "Surely that Christmas and Easter person is just an acquaintance unlike me, I'm a true disciple and friend..." May we realize that we have turned this back into a game of tally, a game of measurement based on our efforts and works instead of the Work of Christ, the true vine, to call us, prune us, and bear fruit in us.

What is the antidote to this temptation? Jesus reminds us (Verse 16) "You did not choose me, but I chose you..." That's grace, folks. Unless you want to say you *deserved* to be chosen... good luck with that...

Believe it or not I am an introvert. I take naps on Sundays after all this. Got to recharge.

Sometimes it's hard for introverts to make new friends, it's work. But, and this happened to me in college with a friend of mine still to this day, sometimes an extrovert just comes around and adopts you. They keep coming over to the dorm room, they drag you out to the cafeteria, they keep sending the texts. And before you know it, you're friends!

And here is God, choosing you in the waters of baptism. Calling you, over and over in His Word, offering his gift upon gift to you. Christmas or Easter, God be praised! His Word is still there for you, and all in between. And at two in the morning, you call, he answers. And you think God wants you to be an acquaintance? No he chose you to be his child, to be his friend. These are not accidents!

But yet we think, "I'll screw it up," or "I'm not good enough." Well, consider this: He called his disciples friends in this text, and folks, this is Maundy Thursday! Each of them will run away

that night, and refuse to stay awake. And does he say, “On Sunday we will be friends, tonight your just acquaintances?” Does he say, “You are believers but you’re not truly disciples...” No. He says, “I chose you, I will send you, you are my friends.”

And he will go and lay his life down for them. The greatest expression of love.

And has he not done the same for you? Have you not received the benefits of it in water, word, and bread and wine? How could you ever say he is not your King, your friend, who loves you dearly? But notice we can say that not because of a tally slate, but because of his work for you.

What a *privilege* then, not before his work, but after, like a tree of faith bearing fruit, what a privilege then to give him praise! What a privilege then to be a doorkeeper in his house! What a privilege then to reflect his truth and sacrificial love to the world! What a privilege it is then to keep his commandments! Why? Because you are his friend. But notice that’s a different tone than the tally marker isn’t it? Because it comes after His Work for you.

And to steal from our epistle lesson, this is why John can teach us that “his commandments are not burdensome.” His yoke, is a yoke, but it is easy and his burden light.

And we think that is crazy. In a world that thinks we are hateful and bigoted because of his commands. With the temptation to compromise them, to be embarrassed by them, with the weight of guilt when we fall short of them, with the hardship and pain of sickness, depression, fear, and strife...

“Lord, How is this for my good my joy? What kind of friend are you?”

The kind that laid down his life for you. The kind that has upheld the commands for you already, and has gone through all suffering and strife and has overcome it for you. The kind that loves you “as the Father has loved me.”

This is our Risen King. His love is so great, his love is so strong – resurrection, eternal life strong. He wants that life for you. He has given his life for you. Do you think his word and teaching on life is going to be pointless? Useless? No. It’s going to be good, and for your good. He says in verse 11 it’s for your joy, that it may be full. Not fleeting like the world, but lasting, eternal, and spotless.

Rejoice in that promise that his Law and Gospel are for your Good. Celebrate it His Work in your life to make you his own. Live in his word, see if any joy or courage or meaning comes! And when you fall short, which you will, know that you have a friend, who wipes the slate clean, who washes it in his blood, so that you need not fear. Amen.